(d) if so, whether Government had held talks with the States in this regard;

(e) if so, the response of the States in each case; and

(f) the present status of the issue on patent to wheat?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a), (b) and (f) The Government is seized about issues concerning patent on wheat. A Civil Writ Petition No. 64 of 2004 in the matter of Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology *vs.* Union of India and others was filed in the Hon'ble Supreme Court praying to direct the Government of India to facilitate revocation of a patent granted by European Patent Office on a soft-milling wheat which produces dough having unique qualities. On the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, in this case, a Committee was appointed by Secretary, Department of Agricultural Research & Education and Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research to examine the matter. The report of the Committee has since been submitted to the Hon'ble Supreme Court. The patent in question was revoked on 3.10.2004 as per the European Patent rules.

(c) to (e) The Biological Diveristy Act, 2002 provides for conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of biological resources, knowledge and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. This Act also provides for conservation, sustainable utilization and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of utilization of genetic resources.

Section 57, read with Sections 55 and 56, provides the penalties which could be imposed on a company for an offence or contravention under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

South Asian Free-Trade Agreement

323. SHRIMATI SUKHBUNS KAUR:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:
MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) came into being and has been given effect to by Government with effect from January, 2006;

(b) if so, what steps have been taken by Government to give effect to SAFTA;

(c) how far the imports and exports are likely to increase/decrease under SAFTA regime; and

(d) how far this will help to improve economy and trade in the least developed regions, *i.e.* Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) The Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) which was signed during the 12th SAARC Summit in January 2004 was scheduled to come into effect from 1st January 2006. A Committee of Experts (COE) consisting of representatives of all Members States (India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) have already completed negotiations on the outstanding issues and made recommendations in December 2005. The outstanding issues included (1) SAFTA Rules of Origin, (2) Sensitive Lists, (3) Mechanism for Compensations of Revenue Loss (MCRL) for Least Developed Contracting States (LDCs) and (4) Technical Assistance to LDCs in agreed areas the SAARC Secretariat would issue necessary notification after all Member States convey ratification and instruments of ratification to the SAARC Secretariat.

(b) Government of India has already ratified the Agreement and the instruments of ratification are being communicated to the SAARC Secretariat shortly.

(c) and (d) The implementation of SAFTA, is expected to boost intra-SAARC trade as well as India's trade with SAARC countries significantly to the overall benefit of the country. The extent of increase in our trade with SAARC countries and the resultant benefits in this regard to any particular region of the country cannot be quantified at this stage.

Identification of industrially backward districts

†324. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have identified industrial backward areas;

(b) if so, the State-wise details thereof;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.